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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to show the growing use of the World Wide Web to answer questions in the public library from the perspective of a librarian at the Parsippany Public Library in Morris County, New Jersey. Discussion includes the following: information on Parsippany and Morris County; a brief history of the World Wide Web; uses of a search engine and how to conduct a search with one; why the Web should be used for reference; questions for which the Web is not suitable; search possibilities; browsers; the role of the Web and traditional libraries and reference; benefits of Web searches; sample searches; how patrons feel about the Internet and the Web; and future reference possibilities. (AEF)

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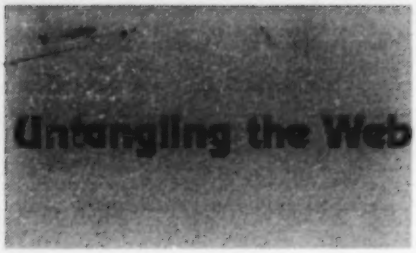

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Wow! This Librarian and These Librarians are Magic! The World Wide Web and Its Use in a Medium Sized Public Library

ED 403 889

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Abstract

The purpose of this talk is to show the growing use of the world wide web to answer questions in the public library. With web access, we can answer many more questions within our own library than we could answer before. Before, for many of our question s, I would have to refer a patron to a larger library or one in a particular specialty. I can now give more and more examples of questions that can be answered with a web search, such as particular companies, that have web pages, and detailed information on cities for example through sites such as City Net., etc. I will cover ways of looking for different web sites using search engines, such as Yahoo and Webcrawler, their advantages and disadvantages.

I will give different web sites I have found while doing searches, and the ways I am indexing them, so you can have the information in ready reference for frequent searches.

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Wow! THIS librarian and THESE librarians are magic!! Doesn't THAT go against our image as quiet. Sounds EXTRAVAGANT & ARROGANT; doesn't it?

I didn't CHOOSE this moniker for us. It was GIVEN to me. One day, I was doing a search for someone. She wanted information on United Parcel Service. United Parcel has a large facility in Parsippany, New Jersey; the town where I work & live. She was working for them while in school and doing a paper on them for one of her management classes. Of course, you can use a source, such as *Million Dollar Directory*, or *Dictionary of Corporate Affiliations*. Sure, I could have given her a quick answer as to their sales and who their CEO is. By finding the web page though, I was able to give her all sorts of information about the company. The page was divided into chapters. One for example covered the founding of the country and the history. Another had financial information about the company. Please see your handouts later about the company. In the past, to obtain much of the information she received, she might have had to interview someone high up in the company. This patron might have been able to do this. What about the patron, who for example has a job interview with with the company. They can hardly call the company for the information in that case, unless they have a friend there, can they? I had another patron, in just that type of situation. She needed information for a job interview. I was able to get her information on Harvard Pilgrim Health Plan and HMO/Blue Massachusetts. She was now prepared to ask certain questions when she got to Boston to be interviewed by these companies.

Just so you don't think that I've always thought of the Internet and the world wide web as the librarians panacea... I haven't!! When we first got the Internet Connection in Morris County, New Jersey in the Summer of 1993; I saw it as something that was going to be great for me... Michael Charton. I saw it as something that was going to be a great networking tool for professional librarians. I could network in places like PUBLIB, etc. I couldn't imagine how it was going to help our public, though. At this point, I want to tell you that almost three years ago, I lacked vision and imagination. I have been using the world wide web heavily since last June. My friend, Sara Weissman, a reference librarian at the Morris County Library taught me how to search the web.

Let me give you some information about Parsippany and Morris County, New Jersey. We are located 30 miles due West of New York City in North Central New Jersey. All of the public libraries in Morris County and the County College of Morris are on the same DRA system. It is known as MAIN, which stands for Morris Automated Information Network. We have our own gopher, which is called MORENET. Morenet, has a menu, from which you can get into different facets of the Internet. We do not have our own web browser yet. Now, we have to go into New Jersey Institute of Technology's web browser if we can get in. I do searches on the web from my e-mail only because it is faster.

At this stage, I should give you a brief history of the web and what it is. It was developed in Switzerland by a group of Physicists. As with the rest of the Internet, it was originally mainly for people in academia; especially at defense related institutions. Only since 1994, has the web really taken off in other institutions with items such as home pages, etc. What is the purpose and advantage of the web then. Well you can go from place to place. The only disadvantage is that if I'm not careful, I can get lost in it. I'll find something interesting and stumble into it. You can have intertwined links all over the place. For companies, they can link to many different things.

I wanted to start this off with a couple of examples to whet your appetites. First however, I would like to introduce you to an article on the web that I will quote from. It was in the Summer, 1995 issue of RQ. It is under the Adult Services Section edited by Sharon and Neal Baker, p. 441-444. It's by Paul D. Healey, who is Reference & Instructional Services Librarian at the Warren E. Burger Library, William Mitchell College of Law, St. Paul Minnesota.

Mr. Healey states that the Internet has tremendous potential as a reference tool. A mechanism for searching in an easy intuitive and powerful manner may be at hand with the web. The web is broadly interactive. This is true, the web provides a way to look things up with keywords. This is the positive side of the web. There are negatives. Everything on the web is voluntary. Resources do shift and disappear. How many of you have tried to conduct a search by typing in a favorite site, and you could no longer connect to it. It's gone and it's not your imagination.

I'm from New York City. Can you imagine major Manhattan streets with businesses that vanish. Imagine, if say McGraw Hill Bookstore, which is located at 6th Avenue and 49th Street was suddenly... gone?! It's highly unlikely with McGraw Hill. It can and does happen with web sites. As Mr. Healey writes, and he is correct; a disaster at a site can render it irrevocably unavailable.

I have a personal story of damage in a library. The first week in February, a malfunctioning sprinkler ruined 4,000 books. The point is that the books in many cases can be replaced. A final issue is control. The veracity, accuracy, and objectivity of materials is a problem for libraries.

How many of you have gone onto newsgroups? That is even more of a case of quoting "experts" on certain subjects. Who are these "experts" though?

With print materials, there is an extensive reviewing system to help the librarian look out for shoddy, biased or misleading works. You can read a review in say, *Library Journal,* and it will tell you whether the book is suitable or not and in some cases , which library is the best home for the particular work.

It is very easy to publish a document on the web. I have two web pages; one for my Toastmasters club. (This is a shameless aside and infomercial for Toastmasters International. I think all librarians should join, but that is another issue). The other website is my personal one. Please take a look at them. I put them up on my America Online account. No one edited it. No one checked. Out in cyberspace, it went. No one stopped me from being out there on the world wide web. Mr. Healey calls the web a challenge that parallels Indiana Jones' quest for archaeological treasures. Not exploring the web can be a disservice to your patrons, but be careful of what you find. For these words, I thank Mr. Healey.

This leads me into the next part of the talk. Now that you want to search the web for your patrons, how do you do it?

Before I proceed, who knows what a search engine is? There are many different search engines. I will only cover some of them. What a search engine does, is provide you with a way to look for these different sites. How many of you have done DIALOG searches. You look for terms and for databases, that best fit what you are going to look for. A search engine does some of that. It takes the terms and looks for it by keywords. It searches the different web pages in its base. A search engine accepts different pages. It's free to post your pages, and you may have to apply several times to have a site added. But once added, there they are. A particular engine doesn't have every page ever done. (Unless it's Alta Vista!)

I tell beginners to begin at the beginning. Thank You Lewis Carroll and Alice and Wonderland. Seriously, I suggest beginners use Webcrawler as their first search engine. Webcrawler is now America Online's search engine. You don't have to be an America Online site to have a site on Webcrawler. If you type in a term, say Parsippany, it ranks them from "100" on down, depending on how relevant they are. For example, my home page is ranked "21". This is because Parsippany is mentioned in it; nothing more. If you type in United Parcel Service, that will be the top of the list. It depends on which keywords were indexed in the page. It's easy enough to use, just type in the words you want on the line. The following is true in any search engine. It's not Boolean searching in the sense that you leave connector words, such as "and," "or", out of the search. You just type the words involved. One search I had for example was on Vietnam Veterans and Delayed Stress Syndrome. You leave off the and. It's just Vietnam Veterans Delayed Stress Syndrome. By the way, this is another search I had. It provided an interesting article by a psychiatrist who is a Vietnam Veteran. It was an interesting insight into the psychological plight so many of them sadly face. I was looking this up for a patron, who was frightened because her husband was having violent flashbacks to Vietnam. More on sample searches later. Anyway, for a beginner, I suggest you begin with Webcrawler. It will give you 25 hits at a time. Webcrawler was the first search engine I found. The next I will mention is Lycos, which calls itself the "Catalog of the Internet." I find that with Lycos you can get too many hits, the opposite of Webcrawler, where it can

be a limited number. Lycos isn't that selective. I mentioned Alta Vista earlier. I tried my last name, just for the heck of it. I was getting articles in French as well as one of my father's articles. He is a chemist and a Japanese web site posted one of them. Alta Vista searches by any word it finds.

My favorite search engine... Please wait until I'm done to stone me is... Yahoo. The name appeals to my warped sense of humor. All kidding aside, I'll be serious... A welcome change, my boss would add!

Yahoo has one great advantage for us. They have professional librarians working for them. It is broken down into different categories. Ah, classification! Just the sort of thing librarians like. You can search all of Yahoo, or click onto the categories and limit it that way. When you find pages, at the top of the listing, Yahoo, will tell you what category the particular page is in. I start with the narrow search first and do all of Yahoo if I am not finding anything. One search I had was on drug use in high schools. I began by narrowing it to their Education category. That didn't work, so I searched all of Yahoo and found something. In other words the system isn't foolproof. It's not perfect, but you can start with the narrowed search on certain topics. This way, on a common topic, you aren't starting with 4,000 hits. You can always go to a general search if needed. Webcrawler for example only has the one search mode. From Yahoo, you can go into Open Text or Alta Vista, if you want an even bigger search.

OK, great. You've done these searches. Now what do you hope to find?

As stated before, websites are what people choose to put up. The site can be an article, such as the Delayed Stress Syndrome search I did. It can be a personal home page. The search I did on high school drug use turned out to be a report done by the School of Education at the University of Michigan.

What was the advantage of these searches. For the lady who wanted to information on the Delayed Stress Syndrome, it gave her something specific she could have immediately. Yes, there are books out there on it. Many books on it. Many of those books though are for clinical professionals dealing with the problem. This woman would not have been able to understand the terminology in them. I'm not so sure, I would have been able to understand much of the terminology. I could have given her a couple of magazine articles possibly. The web search, however, provided her with something instant she can have in her hand. This was printed from one of our OPACs. The high school drug use search was specifically for the percentage of students in given years who said they were users. Again, the more specific the search, the better the information you can come up with.

I do this off our e-mail. We don't yet have our own web browser. It's my way of trying to provide extra service for our patrons.

How many web searches do I do? Probably one a day as an average. What determines whether you do a search on the web? That's a judgment call. We as reference librarians have to make that decision. If it's a definite research question, and the patron has the time and the inclination, I will try it. Obviously, for certain searches, you are not going to use the web. If you want to know the state motto of California, it's much faster to look it up in an almanac, than to get online. For certain searches, a good old fashioned book still does the trick. If I know a specific source for a specific question, I'll just direct the patron there. If you get a question such as when was the first light bulb used, *Famous First Facts* would be a much better source than the web. Again, the web is a tool, not a panacea for all the reference questions we ever get. As mentioned in my first example, many companies have web pages and more companies are getting them every day. A company web page is one tool for a patron to get answers about a company. It again depends on the level. If they are a salesman just looking to make calls, Company Name, Address, Phone Number and CEO are normally all they want. If they have an interview, they want as much information as they can get so they can state what they can do for that company. One of Queen Elizabeth the First's spy masters when asked why he paid informants said "information is never too dear." You can never have enough in certain situations.

Before I could search on the web, for many questions, I either had to call Regional Reference or send the patron to certain academic libraries, large public libraries, such as the Newark Public Library and the possibly the State Library in Trenton. We can now answer 95% of the questions we get at our reference desk, a rate which we are proud of. The web has meant at least one question a day we did not have to send out of our own library. Thanks to the web, we can answer many more questions than before.

I wanted to continue by giving you a list of sites. I won't mention all of my favorites here. I could do another talk just

on that. One thing you can do is every time you do a search, if you think it's a site you will use over and over, keep the address in a notebook or bookmark it on your system if you can. In my e-mail, I have regular sites bookmarked. This way, I don't have to memorize the address. I just hit that line and off I go. It's like having macros in your e-mail for the people you contact all the time.

My favorite site is City Net. http:///www.city.net. This is a listing of cities all over the world. It's maintained by a man named Kevin Altis. Different companies and or people put up information on certain cities. I was looking up sites for every city that I stopped in on this trip. One of my favorite guides is the one to St. Louis, put up by a man named J. Brent Hicks. You can't really find much in the way of guidebooks to St. Louis. It's a site that provides history, places to go, places to avoid, ethnic neighborhoods etc. It's done by a native, who pulls no punches and lets you know what he thinks. You aren't going to get the same with every city. Maybe I'll do a separate one for Brooklyn, which is where I grew up. That leads me to another site I saved. http://www.brooklyn.net. It's official name is 1010 President Street. It has stories of Brooklyn people. I put one up about playing stickball on my block as a kid. There is a link to a file on abandoned subway and elevated stations. Another is for a speakers bureau I belong to. The point is these are sites I go to all the time. I am also working on a web page for the Parsippany Library. I am bookmarking sites of interest to have as links on the Parsippany Web Page. These include a list of New Jersey Congressmen, Botanical Gardens in New Jersey, the State of New Jersey Page etc. If you have graphics, you can see Governor Whitman's picture at the top. The point is that I have these, so when we have a web page, patrons will be able to find certain things immediately.

Next question. Lynx or graphics. What sort of web browser do you want? We use the Lynx browser through our e-mail. Lynx was set up by the University of Kansas. It is straight text, no graphics. The first screen shows you the different search engines. There are instructions at the bottom. By typing "G", you get a line to type a specific site address in. You search by hitting the right arrow key or return, depending on the machine. The left arrow key takes you back a step. By hitting print, you can print everything there or load it into your e-mail. You can type in Gopher and FTP addresses, as well. Most, but not all web addresses are going to begin with the "www" prefix. You always need to have http:// before any search. My pages for example begin with members.aol.com. Anyone with an AOL account has this. I'll use my address as an example http://members.aol.com/mrlibrary/resume. "http" stands for hypertext protocol. "Mrlibrary' is my handle on AOL and no, I didn't invent it. The single slashes in a web page act as the path. My Toastmasters page has masters at the end to distinguish it. As you know, many addresses can be extremely long.

Lynx was the first system I saw. Many people prefer it because there are no graphics. This means it loads faster and you don't have to sit through it. We just got a new Pentium in reference, that will have Netscape on it. Many businessmen I've worked with prefer Lynx, because it just comes up. I tend to like graphics in moderation. If the system is slow though, do you want your patron standing there waiting for the graphics to load up, pretty as they are. Especially if the are 400,000 bytes to up load, as there were when I had to print out the entire Telecomm Bill that President Clinton signed.

To sum up browsers, graphics make it fun, but your patron has other places to go and you have other customers.

Back to what can you REALLY search with the web. Almost anything. Again, you aren't going to search basic questions, but with judgment and experience, you'll know which ones those are. Again, you have to watch the detours, though some of those detours can make it a lot of fun and you may find other things you weren't counting on. One strange example was how I found www.brooklyn.net. I was looking for information on Clara Barton. I found the Brooklyn site, because it mentioned Clara Barton High School. So you never know. Just don't get lost in cyberspace when you are helping someone. Save that for playing with it. I do keep the sites I do find for future use. That's why the more keywords you have, the narrower the search and the more likely the websites you find will be more useful.

Will the web and Internet replace traditional libraries? I don't think so. The world wide web is wonderful for reference. It's not wonderful to read a classic or a bestseller on the Internet. More people work with computers at work and at home, sometimes all day. How many folks are going to go home and read a book online? *War and Peace*, online?! I'm not so sure that will fly. There will still be a need for traditional libraries and traditional sources. For reference, the web will become more and more useful as time goes on with new and better sources.

track or siding? Since I took the train out here, this is my metaphor. This is a sort of extension of whether the Internet and the web would effect how libraries operate. Businesses more and more have Internet access, which means web access. A large company can probably hire people to searches for them. The public library is still free though, and how many companies cut their corporate libraries in tough times? From my experience, I have found most of the local corporate people, and we have a lot of them in Parsippany, don't know anything about the web and they are relieved that someone does. A large company will cut its library, because it isn't a money making part of the company. Small businesses don't have a choice. They have to have us do searches for them. So to answer that question, we can end up on the main track and not the siding if we take advantage of our opportunities. There was a turn of the century political boss in New York named George Washington Plunkitt, who said, I seen my opportunities and I took 'em. That's what we as librarians have to do with the web.

One of the things I try and do because of my contacts in Toastmasters is go into the local companies and teach them about the world wide web. I've had people who were concerned that they could learn how to do it themselves and not need us any longer. Many feared they would only call us with questions about problems logging in. My experience has been, they know nothing about it and again, they think it's magic when we get them answers from the web. In that case, do we tell them how to do it, or do we keep it as "magic?" From my experience, most of our patrons, are perfectly happy with us doing the work. It's a different level of the high school kid who comes in and wont touch the OPAC for the Library Catalog but wants us to do it. They want us to do it.

To conclude, where are we going? That is a good question. Normally, I don't like making predictions like that. I have read all of the futurist Alvin Toffler's books, for example. I've found by reading those, you can only predict the future by what is going on now. I'll take a stab at it.

I think the web will enhance reference. Especially for small and medium sized libraries, which can't have a lot of resources. With the web, you can bring the resources to the library. It will not completely change the way reference is done in the Parsippany Public Library. What it has done is made it possible to do searches that before we could not do in house. We would have to send the patron to a library with a specialty. By searching the web though, I can just print off a site and take it from there.

Remember. It behooves us to work with the technology as much as possible. We as librarians can be at the forefront of the information technology. We can ride the express. Maybe we should let them think the web and We are magic? Or will it be better for us to work on training the public, so it wont be as much of a mystery? This is the question, we have to answer and that we have to work out as time goes on. Think about it.

Reference

Healy, Paul. "Untangling the Web: The World Wide Web As A Reference Tool." *RQ*. Summer, 1995 pp. 441-444.

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